

Foreign Opinion Note

United States Information Agency
Washington, D.C. 20547



Office of Research

USIA

May 19, 1983

EUROPEAN PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF INF

Current opinion poll data call into question some common beliefs framing the debate about INF issues.

BELIEF: Europeans are preoccupied with INF.

- Salience: INF is the most important international concern for Europeans, but it has considerably lower salience than various domestic issues across all countries.

% Concerned
(Approximate ranges)

-- Unemployment.....	65-75%
-- Crime/safety.....	30-40%
-- Inflation.....	30-40%
-- Social services....	10-20%
-- War threat.....	10-20%
-- INF deployment.....	10-20% (FRG & Netherlands = 20%)

Not surprising, INF has most salience among the better educated.

- Attention: Only 10-20% in any country follow INF issues in the media "very closely."
- Actions taken: Most people have "done nothing" to show their position on deployment: 70-80% in Italy, the U.K., and Belgium; 60%-range in the Netherlands and FRG.

Actions taken (10-20% range) include: persuade others, vote for appropriate candidates, sign petitions.

Only in the Netherlands does an appreciable proportion of people claim to take part in demonstrations: about 10 percent of the general public and 25 percent of the better educated.

BELIEF: Europeans are "paralyzed" by the fear of war.

- Near-term: Most (70-80%) discount the likelihood of an actual Soviet attack in the near future. And pluralities (50%-level) are unconcerned about Soviet political intimidation.
- Long-term: Most (60-80%) "can't really believe" that nuclear war could happen.

-2-

BELIEF: The USSR has nuclear superiority in Europe.

- o INF Monopoly: Only 10-20% know that the USSR has a monopoly of "land-based medium-range nuclear missiles." So, there remains great confusion and ignorance (80-90%) of the missile imbalance. This has not changed much from past surveys.

There are various incorrect perceptions. Most commonly, two-thirds (65%) think that both the NATO countries of Western Europe and the Soviet Union have medium-range nuclear missiles "on their soil." Accordingly, INF deployment is probably seen by most as enhancing an existing capability.

- o British-French Missiles: When told about the British and French missiles, majorities (55%-level) know that the missiles are for national defense, except in the U.K., where people are divided (40%-level) about whether the missiles are for NATO's defense or national defense only.
- o Nuclear Strength: Only the British (50%) see the USSR "ahead" of the U.S. on "nuclear missile strength in Europe."

Elsewhere, Europeans are about as likely to see the U.S. and USSR as equal (35-40%) as to see the USSR ahead (35-40%). Few anywhere see the U.S. strongest (15%-level).

BELIEF: INF is in NATO's common interest.

- o Whose Interests: Europeans are only marginally more likely to see INF deployment as serving the mutual interests of the U.S. and Western Europe (35-45%) than to see INF mainly serving U.S. interests (30-35%).

Only a few think that INF deployment is mainly in the interests of Western Europe.

- o Deterrence: The British tend to see INF as a deterrent force (45%-to-20%).

Elsewhere, opinion is split in the FRG and Netherlands (30%-level) and in Italy and Belgium (40%-level) over whether INF "would help prevent" or would "increase the risk" of war.

This is no real change since last fall.

-3-

BELIEF: Soviets have become the "party of peace."

- Military Motives: Most people continue to see both the U.S. (60%-level) and the USSR (70-80%) as seeking military superiority over each other. This is no real change from earlier findings.
- Peaceful Intentions: Europeans are somewhat more likely to say recent "policies and actions" of the USSR are contributing to the "risk of war" (40-60%) than to say the same of the U.S. (40-50%). However, the U.S. has generally fallen in perceptions of its peaceful intentions.
- Sincerity: At the same time, the U.S. standing has generally improved everywhere in European perceptions of its sincerity in arms negotiations (45-60%).

U.S. sincerity is the prevailing perception in three countries, whereas the Italians remain divided (45%-level) and the Belgians tend to see the U.S. as not making a genuine effort in negotiations (55%-to-45%).

Although the U.S. does better than the Soviet Union in all countries, perceived Soviet sincerity has improved in the FRG, where people are now divided at the 35%-level. The USSR has dropped considerably in the Netherlands, where people also are divided now at the 35%-level.

Majorities (65%-level) in the other countries see the USSR as insincere in negotiations.

- U.S. Arms Proposals: Uncertainty governs public knowledge of the various arms proposals. However, when U.S. sponsorship is identified, majorities everywhere (55%-75%) "favor" President Reagan's recent proposal that both sides station "roughly the same number" of missiles in Europe.

Prepared by:
G. Hursh-Cesar
485-2968

N-5/19/83